

What are the Information Needs of Communities & Citizens? We could use more timely and more online access to government records, especially in the form of searchable databases.

As a major metropolitan area, we do have several local television stations, but only one daily paper. We have several strong weekly papers. The print version of that single daily paper provides the greatest breadth of local news coverage. The television stations' local reporting is heavily geared toward weather, crime, sports and business promotion. There is very little reporting, for example, on the local or state legislative proceedings especially on television, with the exception of local coverage on the government cable access television channel. The emergency and safety alert system seems to work well, including on cable tv and is tested regularly. However, there are other areas of Central Indiana that are not covered by any warning sirens.

The resources to support neighborhood or hyper-local communications are almost non-existent.

How is Commercial Media Serving Your Community?

Commercial media is not adequate in serving the needs of the community and representing the diversity of voices in the area.

We have had a dramatic reduction in the amount of local news reporting on radio due to consolidation. We have only one daily paper and it is not locally owned. There seems to be fewer and fewer (and younger) paid reporters. Overall, there is less local investigative reporting and more media partnerships for news gathering.

One idea that we have written about is the need to bring back the fairness doctrine. It also seems that creative public policies could bolster nonprofit, newsgathering organizations.

What is the State of Noncommercial, Nonprofit, and Public Media?

The situation in Indianapolis and Indiana is a testament to the need for the US to strengthen noncommercial, community media. Our organization, Public Access of Indianapolis, Inc. was started after the City of Indianapolis and the local cable operators decided to eliminate public access television in 1996. The former public access channel on cable tv was turned over to a local, low-power tv station as a way of putting them on cable.

Since the elimination of public access TV in 1996, the number of community programmers on cable television has dropped sharply. Public access TV was replaced by "Local Community Interest Programming" (LCIP) -- a requirement for Comcast and Bright House Networks to provide 25 hours per week of programming from local religious, cultural, literary, non-profit and public health organizations. That programming was outsourced to a low-power tv station in an agreement to finally

get a place on cable television. That channel, WDNI, Indy's Music Channel. primarily shows music videos. Our organization studied the programming on WDNI in 2003 and found an average of only 5.5 hours -not 25 - met the definition of LCIP. In 1993 on public access tv, there were 36.5 hours of community generated programming per week. Furthermore, the number of community programming voices had dropped from 53 in 1993 when there was public access TV, to 24 in 2001 and 11 in 2003.

For additional details, see:

<http://www.indyaccess.org/indy-needs/lcip/lcip-and-imc-analysis/>

<http://www.indyaccess.org/indy-needs/lcip/lcip-hearing/>

<http://www.indyaccess.org/downloads/localcommunityinterestprogramming.pdf>

<http://www.indyaccess.org/indy-needs/lcip/imc-schedule-may-2003/>

Hopes of rectifying this situation with the signing of new local cable franchise agreements were dashed with the enactment of statewide video franchising in Indiana in 2006. That law has directly led to the demise of additional public access television stations in the state (see <http://www.indyaccess.org/news/pai-news/comcast-closes-public-access-tv/>) as well as problems with getting agreed to franchise fees and other support for PEG stations and municipalities.

While public access television was eliminated in Indianapolis, the city has a strong government access tv operation with two channels, and another two channels for educational access TV. The first government access TV channel provides gavel-to-gavel coverage of most City-County Council meetings, and recordings of those meetings are available online via a searchable index. The second government access TV channel offers replays of meetings, and other original programs and coverage of city events.

One other small bright spot is a new, community-oriented local radio station, WITT.

We would really like to see public media go back to its original intent of providing local programming, being more participatory, and offer greater diversity.

Local nonprofit websites are not competing with traditional media on news coverage.

What is the Impact of the Internet and Mobile Information?

There are few choices for broadband and the prices are perceived to be high outside of promotions. There are no substantial community wireless projects. The cable and telephone companies are not building networks with fiber to the home.

Social networks are a key part of the news ecosystem, but they (and blogs) don't replace a cadre of trained, paid, and independent journalists.

The local government has a substantial presence online. Quite noteworthy is the online video archive of local government meetings. Some access to government services has been privatized.